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**Testimony Re: H7904 An Act Relating To Domestic Relations -- Support
Of Children**

House Finance Committee

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for the *intent* of House Bill 7904 which would remove the obligations for a parent to pay support and maintenance to agencies having custody of their child in foster care. We would like to thank Representative Casimiro for sponsoring this bill and Representatives Cruz, Noret, Serpa, Diaz, and Alzate for co-sponsoring.

In July of 2022, the Children's Bureau and the Office of Child Support Enforcement issued federal guidance that clarifies legislative intent around the assignment of child support obligations when children are placed in foster care. Prior to July 2022, states across the country, including Rhode Island, would charge parents child support payments and make these payments to the state when their children were in state care. The updated guidance "encourages child welfare agencies to implement across-the-board policies" regarding assignment of child support "*only in very rare circumstances.*" Since the federal guidelines were updated, California, Michigan, Montana, and Washington have taken action to reduce referrals to child support for parents when their children are placed in foster care.

Rhode Island has not taken steps to comply with the updated federal guidelines, and national working groups have urged Rhode Island to amend state law to match federal guidance. **Collecting child support from families whose children are in care can prolong their stay in care and prolong reunification.** Research shows that when mothers pay just \$100 per month toward their child support obligation, the likelihood of reunifying with their child declines by almost one-fifth. Further, children whose parents make child support payments stay in care an average of 6.6 months longer than children whose parents are not required to make these payments.

Additionally, in states like Rhode Island, we are likely spending more in administrative costs to collect child support payments from parents for their children in foster care than the actual amount collected – essentially we are losing more money than is collected. In fact, in 2022, Rhode Island collected just over \$11,000 in "foster care child support" cases. Based on cost-benefit

analyses from other states, Rhode Island is likely spending over \$44,000 in child support administrative costs alone to collect this \$11,000. Child support enforcement increases family poverty, and as research shows, family poverty increases the risk of child maltreatment and therefore may increase the likelihood of re-entry to foster care.

We are hesitant to support the bill in its current form as the language does not match its intent. However, we are happy to work with the sponsor and legislative counsel on a Substitute A of this bill that would comply with federal guidance and do what it is intended to do.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

